"Old Lady Number 31"

By Louis Forsslund

Read This Fascinating Serial Story as It Will Appear from Week to Week In The Farmington Times

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER I—Captain Abraham Rose and Angelina, his wife, have lost their little home through Abe's unlucky purchase of Trostly Gold mining stock. Their household goods sold, the $100 auction money, all they have left, will place Abe in the Old Man's home, or Angy in the Old Ladies' home. Both are self-sacrificing but Abe decides. "My dear this is the fust time I've had a chance to take the wust of it."

CHAPTER II—The old couple, dressed in their ancient Sunday best, bid good-by to the little house. Terror of "what folks will say" sends them along by-paths to the gate of the Old Ladies' home. Resting there on a bench, the soft June air lulls them to sleep.

CHAPTER III—Miss Abigail, matron of the Old Ladies' home, hears of Abe and Angy's ill fortune. She tells the 28 other old lady residents. Blossy, who has paid double entrance fee for the only double bedchamber—Blossy with the gewgaws and the persistent suitor for her withered little hand—says there's only one thing to do: "Take the captain right here—to our hearts." Disposing of all objections, Blossy offers to take empty No. 20 and turn over her wide room to the old couple.

CHAPTER IV — Abe and Angy are whirled away from the gate by fat Miss Abigail to the cool quiet of the big bedchamber, where Abe awakes next morning to the fact that he is the guest of 30 "women-folks"—"Old Gal 31." He covers his feelings by twinkling jokes as they go to breakfast. The 29 meet them with "Welcome" ribbons displayed on their breasts and present him with a huge blue mustache cup inscribed "To our Beloved Brother."

CHAPTER V.

The Head of the Corner.

Everybody wore their company manners to the breakfast table—the first time in the whole history of the home when company manners had graced the initial meal of the day. Being pleasant at supper was easy enough, Aunt Nancy used to say, for every one save the unreasonably rantankerous, and being agreeable at dinner was not especially difficult; but no one short of a saint could be expected to smile of mornings until sufficient time had been given to discover whether one had stepped out on the wrong or the right side of the bed.

This morning, however, no time was needed to demonstrate that everybody in the place had gotten out on the happy side of his couch. Even the deaf-and-dumb gardener had untwisted his surly temper, and as Abraham

"Brother Abe—That's What We've All Agreed to Call Yew."

entered the dining-room, looked in at the east window with a conciliatory grin and nod which said plainly as words:

"'Tis a welcome sight indeed to see one of my own kind around this establishment!"

"Why don't he come in?" questioned Abe, waving back a greeting as well as he could with the treasured cup in one of his hands and the saucer in the other; whereupon Sarah Jane, that ugly duckling, explained that the fellow, being a confirmed woman hater, cooked all his own meals in the smoke house, and insisted upon all his orders being left on a slate outside the tool-house door. Abe sniffed disdainfully, contemplating her homely countenance, over which this morning's mood had cast a not unlovely transforming glow.

"Why, the scalawag!" He frowned so at the face in the window that it immediately disappeared. "'' -w don't mean ter tell me he's sot 'in yew gals? He must be crazy Sech a handsome, clever set o' women I never did see!"

Sarah Jane blushed to the roots of her thin, straight hair and sat down, suddenly disarmed of every porcupine quill that she had hidden under her wings; while there was an agreeable little stir among the sisters.

"Set deown, all hands! Set deown!" enjoined Miss Abigail, fluttering about with the heaviness of a fat goose. "Brother Abe—that's what we've all agreed to call yew, by unanimous vote—yew set right here at the foot of the table. Aunt Nancy always had the head an' me the foot; but I only kept the foot, partly becuz thar wa'n't no man fer the place, and partly becuz I was tew sizable ter squeeze in any whar else. Seein' as Sister Angy is sech a leetle mite, though, I guess she kin easy make room fer me t'other side o' her."

Abe could only bow his thanks as he put his gift down on the table and took the prominent place assigned to him. The others seated, there was a solemn moment of waiting with bowed heads. Aunt Nancy's trembling voice arose—the voice which had jealously guarded the right of saying grace at table in the Old Ladies' home for twenty years—not, however, in the customary words of thanksgiving, but in a peremptory "Brother Abe!"

Abraham looked up. Could she possibly mean that he was to establish himself as the head of the household by repeating grace? "Brother Abe!" she called upon him again. "Yew've askt a blessin' fer one woman fer many a year; supposin' yew ask it fer thirty!"

Amid the amazement of the other sisters, Abe mumbled, and muttered and murmured—no one knew what words; but all understood the overwhelming gratitude behind his incoherency, and all joined heartily in the Amen. Then, while Mrs. Homan, the cook of the week, went bustling out into the kitchen, Aunt Nancy felt that it devolved upon her to explain her action. It would never do, she thought, for her to gain a reputation for self-effacement and sweetness of disposition at her time of life.

"Son, I want yew to understand one thing naow at the start. Yew treat us right, an' we'll treat you right That's all we ask o' yew. Miss Ellie pass the radishes."

"I'll do my best," Abe hastened to assure her. "Hy-guy, that coffee smells some kind o' good, don't it? Between the smell o' the stuff an' the looks o' my cup, it'll be so temptin' that I'll wish I had the neck of a gi-raffe, an' could taste it all the way deown. Angy, I be afraid we'll git the gout a-divin' so high. Look at this here cream!"

Smiling, joking, his lips insisting upon joking to cover the natural feeling of embarrassment incident to this first meal among the sisters, but with his voice breaking now and again with emotion, while from time to time he had to steal his handkerchief to his old eyes, Abe passed successfully through the—to him—elaborate breakfast. And Angy sat in rapt silence, but with her face shining so that her quiet was the stillness of eloquence. Once Abe startled them all by rising stealthily from the table and seizing the morning's newspaper, which lay upon the buffet.

"I knowed it!" cavilled Lazy Daisy sotto voce to no one in particular. "He couldn't wait for the news till he was through eatin'!" But Abe had folded the paper into a stout weapon, and, creeping toward the window, despatched by a quick, adroit movement a fly which had alighted upon the screen.

"I hate the very sight o' them air pesky critters," he explained half apologetically. "Thar, thar's another one," and slaughtered that.

"My, but yew kin get 'em, can't yew?" spoke Miss Abigail admiringly. "Them tew be the very ones I tried ter ketch all day yiste'day; I kin see as a fly-ketcher yew be a-goin' ter be with a farm ter me. Set deown an' try some o' this here strawberry presarve."

But Abe protested that he could not eat another bite unless he should get up and run around the house to "joggle deown" what he had already swallowed. He leaned back in his chair and surveyed the family: on his right, generous-hearted Blossy, who had been smiling approval and encouragement at him all through the repast; at his left, and just beyond Angy, Miss Abigail indulging in what remained on the dishes now that she discovered the others to have finished; Aunt Nancy keenly watching him from the head of the board; and all the other sisters "betwixt an' between."

He caught Mrs. Homan's eye where she stood in the doorway leading into the kitchen, and remarked pleasantly:

"Ma'am, yew oughter set up a pancake shop in 'York. Yew could make a fortune at it. I hain't had sech a meal o' vittles sence I turned fifty year o' age."

A flattered smile overspread Mrs. Homan's visage, and the other sisters, noting it, wondered how long it would be before she showed her claws in Abraham's presence.

"Hy-guy, Angy," Abe went on, "yew can't believe nothin' yew hear, kin yer? Why, folks have told me that yew ladies— What yew hittin' my foot fer, mother? Folks have told me," a twinkle of amusement in his eye at the absurdity, "that yew fight among yerselves like cats an' dogs, when, law! I never see sech a clever lot o' women gathered tergether in all my life. An' I believe—mother, I hain't a-sayin' nothin'! I jest want ter let 'em know what I think on 'em. I believe that thar must be three hunderd hearts in this here place 'stid o'

"I Never See Such a Clever Lot of Women."

thirty. But dew yew know, gals, folks outside even go so fur 's ter say that yew throw plates at one another!"

There was a moment's silence, then a little gasp first from one and then from another of the group. Every one looked at Mrs. Homan, and from Mrs. Homan to Sarah Jane. Mrs. Homan tightened her grip on the pancake turner; Sarah Jane uneasily moved her long fingers within reach of a sturdy little red-and-white pepper pot. Another moment passed, in which the air seemed filled with the promise of an electric storm. Then Blossy spoke hurriedly—Blossy, the tactician—clasping her hands together and bringing Abe's attention to herself.

"Really! You surprise me! You don't mean to say folks talk about us like that!"

"Slander is a dretful long-legged critter," amended Miss Abigail, smiling and sighing in the same breath.

"Sary Jane," inquired Mrs. Homan sweetly, "what's the matter with that pepper pot? Does it need fillin'?"

And so began the reign of peace in the Old Ladies' home.

CHAPTER VI.

Indian Summer.

Miss Abigail had not banked in vain on the "foresightedness of the Lord." At the end of six months, instead of there being a shortage in her accounts because of Abe's presence, she was able to show the directors such a balance sheet as excelled all her previous commendable records.

"How do you explain it?" they asked her.

"We cast our bread on the waters," she answered, "an' Providence jest kept a-sendin' out the loaves." Again she said. "'Twas grinnin' that done it. Brother Abe he kept the gardener good-natured, an' the gardener he jest grinned at the garden sass until it was ashamed not ter flourish, an' Brother Abe kept the gals good-natured an' they wa'n't so nigsy about what they eat; an' he kept the visitors a-laughin' jest ter see him here, an' when yew make folks laugh they want ter turn around an' dew somethin' fer yew. I tell yew, of yew kin only keep grit ernough ter grin, yew kin drive away a drought."

In truth, there had been no drought in the garden that summer, but almost a double yield of corn and beans; no drought in the gifts sent to the home, but showers of plenty. Some of these came in the form of fresh fish and clams left at the back door; some in luscious fruits; some in barrels of clothing. And the barrels of clothing solved another problem; for no longer did their contents consist solely of articles of feminine attire. "Biled shirts" poured out of them; socks and breeches, derby hats, coats and negligees; until Aunt Nancy with a humorous twist to her thin lips inquired if there were thirty men in this establishment and one woman.

"I never thought I'd come to wearin' a quilted silk basque with tossels on it," Abe remarked one day on being urged to try on a handsome smoking jacket. "Dew I look like one of them sissy-boys, er jest a dude?"

"It's dretful becoming," insisted Angy, "bewtiful! Ain't it, gals?"

Every old lady nodded her head with an air of proud proprietorship, as if to say, "Nothing could fail to become our brother." And Angy nodded her head, too, in delighted approval of their appreciation of "our brother" and "my husband."

Beautiful, joy-steeped, pleasure-filled days these were for the couple, who had been cramped for life's smallest necessities so many meager years. Angy felt that she had been made miraculously young by the birth of this new Abraham—almost as if at last she had been given the son for whom in her youth she had prayed with impassioned appeal. Her old-wife love became rejuvenated into a curious mixture of proud mother-love and young-wife leaning, as she saw Abe win every heart and become the center of the community.

"Why, the sisters all think the sun rises an' sets in him," Angy would whisper to herself sometimes, awed by the glorious wonder of it all.

The sisters fairly vied with one another to see how much each could do for the one man among them. Their own preferences and prejudices were magnanimously thrust aside. In a body they besought their guest to smoke as freely in the house as out of doors. Miss Abigail even traded some of her garden produce for tobacco, while Miss Ellie made the old gentleman a tobacco pouch of red flannel so generous in its proportions that on a pinch it could be used as a chest protector.

Then Ruby Lee, not to be outdone by anybody, produced, from no one ever discovered where, a mother-of-pearl manicure set for the delight and mystification of the hero; and even Lazy Daisy went so far as to cut some red and yellow tissue paper into squares under the delusion that some time, somehow, she would find the energy to roll these into spills for the lighting of Abe's pipe. And each and every sister from time to time contributed some gift or suggestion to her "brother's" comfort.

It "plagued" the others, however, to see that none of them could get ahead of Blossy in their noble endeavors to make Abraham feel himself a light and welcome burden. She it was who discovered that Abe's contentment could not be absolute without griddlecakes for breakfast three hundred and sixty-five times a year; she it was who first baked him little saucer cakes and pies because he was partial to edges; and Blossy it was who made out a list of "Don'ts" for the sisters to follow in their treatment of this grown-up young old boy.

"Don't scold him when he leaves the doors open. Don't tell him to wipe his feet Don't ever mention gold mines or shiftless husbands," etc., etc.

All these triumphs of Blossy's intuition served naturally to spur the others on to do even more for Brother Abe than they had already done, until the old man began to worry for fear that he should "git spilt." When he lay down for his afternoon nap and the house was dull and quiet without his waking presence, the ladies would gather in groups outside his door as if in a king's antechamber, waiting for him to awaken, saying to one another ever and again, "Sh, sh!" He professed to scoff at the attentions he received, would grunt and growl "Humbug!" yet nevertheless he thrived in this latter-day sunlight. His old bones took on flesh. His aged kindly face, all seamed with care as it had been, filled out, the wrinkles turning into twinkles. Abraham had grown young again. With the return of his youth came the spirit of youth to the Old Ladies' home. Verily, verily, as Blossy had avowed from the first, they had been in sore need of the masculine presence. The ancient coat and hat, which had hung in the hall so long, had perhaps served its purpose in keeping the burglars away, but this lifeless substitute had not prevented the crabbed gnomes of loneliness and discontent from stealing in. Spinster, wife and widow, they had every one been warped by the testy jest-so-ness of the old maid.

Now, instead of fretful discussions of health and food, recriminations and wrangling, there came to be laughter and good-humored chatter all the day long, each sister striving with all her strength to preserve the new-found harmony of the home. There were musical evenings, when Miss Abigail opened the melodeon and played "Old Hundred," and Abraham was encouraged to pick out with one stiff forefinger "My Grandfather's Clock." "Hymn tunes" were sung in chorus; and then, in answer to Abe's appeal for something livelier, there came time-tried ditties and old, old love songs. And at last, one night, after leaving the instrument silent, mute in the corner or the parlor for many years, Aunt Nancy Smith dragged out her harp, and, seating herself, reached out her knotted, trembling hands and brought forth what seemed the very echo, so faint and faltering it was, of "Douglas, Douglas, Tender and True."

There was a long silence after she had finished, her head bowed on her chest, her hands dropped to her sides. Abraham spoke first, clearing his throat before he could make the words come.

"I wish I could git a husband fer every one of yer," said he.

And no one was angry, and no one laughed; for they all knew that he was only seeking to express the message conveyed by Nancy's playing—the message of love, love triumphant, which cannot age, which over the years and over death itself always hath the victory.

(Continued next week.)

FROM MANY LANDS

(By Jennie Hunt.)

The Basket Baby

All of us are probably familiar with

Bye, Baby Bunting,
Father's gone a-huntin—
Huntin' for a rabit skin
To wray our Baby Bunting in.

You and I, our mothers and fathers, and thousands of other children for generations have been lulled to sleep with this song. It should be sung to the little Klingit babies in Alaska, for their fathers are often off hunting for the rabit skin to really wrap the baby in.

The Klingit mother weaves from the inner bark of the cedar a sliper-like basket, stiffened up the long back with reeds or slender withes, for baby's cradle. This basket work is covered with a cunningly fitted case of strong, coarse muslin made with flaps below the pillow to button over baby when he's tucked cozily in. She gathers quantities of beautiful, soft, feathery moss and has it dried and ready to use for packing under and around baby in his basket.

Also there are soft rabit skins to dress for extra wrapping on the wee feet and legs. Bits of blanket are set apart for the chest and shoulders of the newcomer, who is first thoroughly oiled, then wrapped about with his little blanket and slipped into his moss-lined nest; the feet are snugged in with the rabit skins and the moss is packed in about the body, then the flaps are drawn in together and buttoned over the folded arms and from under the chin all the way down to the feet. Baby's head is sometimes covered by a little fitted cap, sometimes by only a fold of a blanket, leaving the face alone exposed to view. Baby is now ready to be moved about even by a careless or inexperienced nurse without danger to spine of limb. The basket is easily swung by leathern ropes across a corner of the house, and by means of a string attached to the side of the cradle it can be rocked by a person even too infirm or crippled to do other things.

When the baby grows old enough to "take notice" his elders often stand him up in his basket against the wall so that he can look about and see what is going on, though not unnecessary care is given him, no nerve-taxing effort is made to hurry speech and laughter. He lives in his basket day and night; eats in it, sleeps in it, and travels in it. Occasionally he is taken out and rubbed all over with oil. When he goes abroad in cold weather, it is still in his basket under father's or mother's blanket. In summer during busy times, such as the fishing or berry seasons, he is set up against a rock or tree out of the way. It is at these times that flies and mosquitoes plague the poor little unprotected face, for the baby hands are securely buttoned inside. Still this is the safest period of a Klingit child's life, and I have sometimes wondered if the proverbial patience and tractability of the race were not tracable to this early experience.

I think all teachers of Alaskan children have been surprised to find them so easily governed, gentle and obedient, while yet possessing so much of spirit and enterprise. In common with the Indians of our plains, corporal punishment is unknown among Klingits as a means of family discipline. Physical pain is given to another, whether child or adult, only as "an eye for an eye" retribution or as a means of driving out an evil spirit which superstition leads them to believe possesses certain persons.

When a child is about a year old ter, as the Klingit says, two years old, meaning one summer and one winter), he is released from the basket life, and is thenceforth at the mercy of the world, being mainly in the charge of other children who are but little more than babies themselves. They make a pouch of their blankets, and in these carry the babies upon their backs; even while at play they dart about thus, seeming hardly to notice this precious burden. Very often baby drops out of his pocket during a game of tag and is hurt. To accidents of this kind more than any other cause can be charged the large number of deformities among the native people.—Mrs. Eugene S. Willard, in "Children of the Far North."

TRAVELER'S GUIDE.

To reach Farmington you can use either one of the following routes:

From the North.
(Via St. Louis.)

M. R. & B. T. Ry.—Leave St. Louis at 7:32 a. m. and 4:05 p. m., arriving at Farmington over electric railway

Iron Mountain and Illinois Southern via Bismarck—Arrive at Farmington over electric railway from Esther at 4:31 p. m.

from Flat River at 11:56 a. m. and 7:36: p. m.

Frisco & Illinois Southern—Leave St. Louis at 8:05 a. m., arriving at Farmington over electric railway from Esther at 2:11 p. m.

Iron Mountain—Leave St. Louis at 7:32 or 9:05 a. m., arriving at Farmington over the electric railway from DeLassus at 12:36 p. m.

From the South.

Iron Mountain via Bismarck and DeLassus—Arrive at Farmington over electric railway at 12:36 p. m.

Belmont Branch of Iron Mountain—Arrive at Farmington over electric railway from DeLassus at 2:27 p. m.

Frisco and Illinois Southern via Ste Genevieve—Arrive at Farmington over electric railway from Esther at 2:11 p. m.

Cape Girardeau Northern—Arrive at Farmington at 8:10 p. m. from Cape Girardeau and intermediate points. Going south the train leaves Farmington at 7:00 a. m. Both trains make connection with Frisco trains at Perryville Junction.

To Reach St. Louis.

You can go over either of the roads at the following hours:

Illinois Southern & Frisco—Leave Farmington over electric railway to Esther at 2:14 p. m., arriving in St. Louis at 8:25 p. m.

M. R. & B. T.—Leave Farmington over electric railway to Flat River at 5:55 a. m. and 2:14 p. m., arriving in St. Louis at 9:55 a. m. and 6:27 p. m. Fare from Farmington, $1.66. Round trip, $3.22, (if passenger can go and return same day, the round trip rate is $3.22).

Iron Mountain—Leave Farmington over electric railway to DeLassus at 1:37 p. m., arriving in St. Louis at 6:27 p. m. Fare for one way from Farmington 21.90; round trip, $3.80.

ST. FRANCOIS COUNTY RY. CO.
Time Table (Condensed.)

Between Farmington and Flat River.

Lv. Farmington.	Arr. Flat River.
5:55 a. m.	6:31 a. m.
7:28 a. m.	8:04 a. m.
8:57 a. m.	9:34 a. m.
10:15 a.m.	10:53 a. m.
12:50 p. m.	1:26 p. m.
2:14 p. m.	2:50 p. m.
4:54 p. m.	5:30 p. m.
6:34 p. m.	7:10 p. m.
Lv. Flat River	**Arr. Farmington**
6:37 a. m.	7:13 a. m.
8:06 a. m.	8:42 a. m.
9:37 a. m.	10:14 a. m.
11:05 a. m.	11:41 a. m.
1:35 p. m.	2:11 p. m.
3:55 p. m.	4:31 p. m.
5:38 p. m.	6:14 p. m.
7:20 p. m.	7:56 p. m.

Between Farmington and Lead Belt.

Local Service between Farmington and Leadwood, Bonne Terre, Elvins and intermediate points: Cars leaving Farmington at 5:55 and 8:57 a. m. and 4:54 p. m. make direct connections with M. R. & B. T. Ry. at Flat River for Bonne Terre and Leadwood and intermediate points.

Cars leaving Farmington at 7:28 and 10:15 a. m. and 2:14 and 4:54 p. m., make direct connections with the M. R. & B. T. Ry., at Flat River for Elvins and intermediate points.

All M. R. & B. T. Ry., trains make direct connections at Flat River with electric cars for Farmington and intermediate points.

Between Farmington and DeLassus.

Lv. Farmington.	Arr. DeLassus.
11:14 p. m.	12:50 p. m.
1:37 p. m.	1:45 p. m.
Lv. DeLassus.	**Arr. Farmington**
12:35 p. m.	12:50 p. m.
2:15 p. m.	2:27 p. m.

NOTICE TO CONTRACTORS AND BUILDERS

The undersigned, officers of Consolidated School District No. 1, Knob Lick, St. Francois County, Mo., will receive bids up to and including the 21st inst., for the erection of a school building, plans and specifications for which may be seen at the office of the McCarthy Construction Company at Farmington, or with the Secretary of the Board of Education at Knob Lick.